

D&D Fiction

Oroon Rising, Part 6

by Ed Greenwood



Chapter 6: The Idol with the Bowl

"Lizardfolk, as always. They'll know we're here the moment we step on any flagstone beyond yon steps," Jallana murmured.

"Alarm gongs," Lockilgar agreed almost happily. "Any of the first three rows, at least."

Tarlastra gave him a look. "And you know this how?"

"That's as far as I've ever been able to leap," the halfling admitted.

"You're remembering now, too?"

Lockilgar nodded, his inane grin vanishing for a moment. "All too well."

"So you recall yon idol always animates the moment we either spill lizardfolk blood anywhere on it or the upper flight of steps, or when we ascend those steps."

"And take any step beyond the top one," Lockilgar agreed. "And then it smashes us to jelly with its fists, or snatches and hurls us into a pillar or wall, to hear our bones shatter. I remember, all right."

Jallana nodded, seeing hazy memories—a host of them—of the halfling crushed to jelly under the idol's thunderously-descending clenched fist, of Lockilgar screaming, running and being plucked up and hurled down at the flagstones. She shuddered, remembering how it had felt when the idol had done the same to her.

By the look on Tarlastra's face, she was doing the same thing. Then she reached out a hand and spun the halfling around, earning a hiss of anger and a dagger almost in her ribs for her pains. Almost.

"Godsfire, Lady Dwarf, don't do that!" Lockilgar hissed. "I nearly—"

"Listen to me, Lockilgar the Brave," the wizard said firmly, staring into his eyes. "I don't expect you to remember the promise you made me last time, particularly as Ransur broke his and got us all swiftly killed, but I want you to agree to it again now. You're the most agile of us three, and the best climber. I want to try about the only thing we haven't done fighting the Great Idol yet. Even if it's crazed, it should keep you alive longer than Jallana or me, because you'll be riding the thing, and can try to get yourself to where it can't reach without overbalancing, and perhaps—who knows?—collapsing."

The halfling nodded eagerly, irritation gone from his face and eyes beginning to shine. "So what's this daring

deed you're trying so hard to convince me to do? It sounds—”

“Crazed already? Yes, but hear me out. Recall you how the idol’s eye-gems always light up when it awakens? And Ransur looks at them like he’s starving, and says just one of them sold would see us all lolling in our own bright castles and dining on swan and pegasi and choice rothé for the rest of our long and golden days? And he races right up one of those arms—you’d think the idol would be expecting him to do it by now, and be ready to just slap him across the room—to pry them loose?”

Lockilgar nodded. “He usually manages it, swifter than I could snatch up tarts as a lad, when the hinwives were baking. Not that it keeps him alive long. The gems stay a-glow, and removing them from the idol doesn’t make it halt—or seem not to be able to see us, for that matter.”

Tarlastra smiled. “I want you to do something else with the gems. Pry them free, yes—and then hurl them down into the bowl, as hard as you can, right into the flames.”

“Certainly, but why?”

“Tis the only thing we haven’t tried yet, and there must be a way past this idol that doesn’t involve some long-forgotten spell or password. The Taelarr didn’t craft things like that.”

The halfling nodded again. “So I recall Halorn telling old Skelgar—and Skelgar agreeing, and he was sturking near old enough to have watched the Taelarr cook their last meals and start their great war.”

Jallana snorted her mirth. “So you’ll do it, Hero of All Halflings?”

Lockilgar grinned, his eyes bright. “Godsfire, yes! This should be fun! What will you and Lady Axe here be doing?”

“Dying, most likely,” the warrior-woman told him, her voice dry. She reached up to settle the helm she no longer possessed on her head—and then grinned, shrugged, and hefted her sword. “Ready?”

“Always,” Tarlastra said, half a breath before Lockilgar could.

They traded wolf-grins and burst through the archway, leaving the dwarf’s concealment spell behind.

There were grunts and hisses of surprise, short guttural barks that must be commands, and the lizardfolk guards were rising from their lounging positions on the steps even before the great gongs sounded, to wave their axes and rush to meet the Slayers.

Armor clanking a little in her haste, Jallana hurried to meet them, seeking to fell one before the others could reach her. The dwarf spread her stubby fingers and murmured a spell. Lockilgar hastily ran off to one side, well away from the lizardfolk, looking past them—and up.

Horned and grotesque, the Great Idol was even larger than he remembered. Tall and fire-amber, it loomed up over him like the largest spired temple he'd once seen—that memory was faded; it must have been long ago, now, since his endless delving in Staelghast had begun—cradling its bowl of flames.

There were sizzling sounds and a horrid fishy stench rising from the bowl; the lizardfolk priests must have just fed a sacrifice to it and departed. As he sprinted, dodging deftly past the only scaled-snout to even try to swing its axe at him, Lockilgar stared hard at the arms, trying to decide where best to start his run up one of them.

The Great Idol was sitting cross-legged, cradling the bowl in its lap, and he couldn't help but notice that its fingers were stained dark with old blood. His blood, and those of his fellow Slayers, crushed under those ponderous fists scores of times. A hammering that awaited him soon again, if Tarlastra's notion was as wild and empty-witted as it sounded . . .

There was a wailing, squalling sound from somewhere behind his left shoulder, and the idol's eyes came to life.

Muttering a curse under his breath that turned into a prayer before he was done, Lockilgar sprang up onto the idol's knee. It turned its head, starting to shift one hand out from under the bowl, and he sobbed in the breath he'd need and raced like he'd never run before.

Whooping and choking, the Most Heroic of Halflings sprinted as if his life depended upon it.

Because, of course, it did.



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